

Seventh Grade

Gary Soto

On the first day of school, Victor stood in line half an hour before he came to a wobbly card table. He was handed a packet of papers and a computer card on which he listed his one elective, French. He already spoke Spanish and English, but he thought some day he might travel to France, where it was cool; not like Fresno, where summer days reached 110 degrees in the shade. There were rivers in France, and huge churches, and fair-skinned people everywhere, the way there were brown people all around Victor. ❶

Besides, Teresa, a girl he had liked since they were in catechism classes¹ at Saint Theresa's, was taking French, too. With any luck they would be in the same class. Teresa is going to be my girl this year, he promised himself as he left the gym full of students in their new fall clothes. She was cute. And good in math, too, Victor thought as he walked down the hall to his homeroom. He ran into his friend, Michael Torres, by the water fountain that never turned off.

❶ **PLOT: EXPOSITION**
What background information do you learn about Victor in the first paragraph?

1. catechism (kät'ik'iz'm) classes: formal classes in religious instruction.

They shook hands, *raza*-style,² and jerked their heads at one another in a *saludo de vato*.³ “How come you’re making a face?” asked Victor. **B**

“I ain’t making a face, *ese*.⁴ This is my face.” Michael said his face had changed during the summer. He had read a *GQ*⁵ magazine that his older brother had borrowed from the Book Mobile and noticed that the male models all had the same look on their faces. They would stand, one arm around a beautiful woman, and *scowl*. They would sit at a pool, their rippled stomachs dark with shadow, and *scowl*. They would sit at dinner tables, cool drinks in their hands, and *scowl*.

“I think it works,” Michael said. He scowled and let his upper lip **quiver**. His teeth showed along with the **ferocity** of his soul. “Belinda Reyes walked by a while ago and looked at me,” he said.

Victor didn’t say anything, though he thought his friend looked pretty strange. They talked about recent movies, baseball, their parents, and the horrors of picking grapes in order to buy their fall clothes. Picking grapes was like living in Siberia,⁶ except hot and more boring.

“What classes are you taking?” Michael said, scowling.

“French. How ’bout you?”

“Spanish. I ain’t so good at it, even if I’m Mexican.”

“I’m not either, but I’m better at it than math, that’s for sure.”

A tinny, three-beat bell propelled students to their homerooms. The two friends socked each other in the arm and went their ways, Victor thinking, man, that’s weird. Michael thinks making a face makes him handsome.

On the way to his homeroom, Victor tried a scowl. He felt foolish, until out of the corner of his eye he saw a girl looking at him. Umm, he thought, maybe it does work. He scowled with greater conviction. **C**

In homeroom, roll was taken, emergency cards were passed out, and they were given a bulletin to take home to their parents. The principal, Mr. Belton, spoke over the crackling loudspeaker, welcoming the students to a new year, new experiences, and new friendships. The students squirmed in their chairs and ignored him. They were anxious to go to first period. Victor sat calmly, thinking of Teresa, who sat two rows away, reading a paperback novel. This would be his lucky year. She was in his homeroom, and would probably be in his English and math classes. And, of course, French.

The bell rang for first period, and the students herded noisily through the door. Only Teresa **lingered**, talking with the homeroom teacher.

B CONNECT

How do you greet your friends when you see them in the hall?

quiver (kwīv’ər) v. to shake with a slight, rapid movement

ferocity (fə-rōs’ī-tē) n. fierceness; extreme intensity

C PLOT: EXPOSITION

Reread lines 25–27 and lines 39–41. When the boys scowl, they see girls look at them. What might the girls be thinking?

linger (līŋg’er) v. to continue to stay; delay leaving

2. *raza* (rā’sā)-style Spanish: in the manner that Mexican Americans greet each other.

3. *saludo de vato* (sā-lōō’dō dē bā’tō) Spanish: greeting between Mexican-American friends.

4. *ese* (ē’sē) Spanish: a slang term used in addressing someone, as in “Hey, man.”

5. *GQ*: *Gentleman’s Quarterly*, a magazine of men’s styles and fashions.

6. *Siberia*: a cold, isolated region of northern Russia.